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Mixed Race and Ethnicity in California

By Sonya M. Tafoya

Summary Criticisms from an increasingly diverse racial and ethnic population in the United States have led the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to revise federal standards for collecting race and ethnic data. One change will allow multiracial Americans to check as many race categories as apply to them. Although this change has caused much speculation, exactly how the enumeration of multiracial Americans will affect current public policies remains to be seen.

This issue of *California Counts*[1] provides a context for discussing the multiracial/ethnic population of California, focusing specifically on the increasing number of multiracial/ethnic births in the state. Data are drawn from vital statistics birth records from 1982 to 1997. Multiracial/ethnic births increased from about 12 percent of all births in 1982 to about 14 percent in 1997 and they were more common among native-born mothers than among foreign-born mothers. In 1997, approximately 20 percent of native-born mothers but only 7 percent of foreign-born mothers gave birth to children of mixed race/ethnicity. The number of multiracial/ethnic births varies across counties. In 1997, for example, 11 percent of Los Angeles County births were of mixed race/ethnicity; in Sacramento County, the number was 19 percent.

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Context

In 1977, the OMB established minimum categories for the collection, record-keeping, and presentation of data by race and ethnicity. Table 1 illustrates the two permissible formats for collecting and reporting this information. In the two-question format, two questions were asked about race and ethnicity; thus, persons who reported Hispanic ancestry could also report the racial group that they identified with. In contrast, the one-question format merged race and ethnicity. Respondents were asked to select one of the following five categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black, white, and Hispanic. The Census Bureau used the OMB two-question format in the 1980 and 1990 Censuses.[2] Federal and state agencies were permitted to collect racial and ethnic data in more detail provided that the data could be reduced to the minimum five categories of the one-question format. This minimum standard was established to meet statutory requirements associated with civil rights monitoring and enforcement.[3] Among the 1977 OMB categories, no provision existed for detailed enumeration of multiracial Americans. Multiracial Americans were instructed to select the racial category that most closely reflected their recognition in their community.

Recognizing the growing complexity of racial and ethnic identity in the nation, a variety of critics charged that the original categories no longer reflected the increasing diversity of the nation. Among the critics were a group of multiracial Americans who charged that the established categories forced them to deny their heritage by selecting a single race.[4] In 1993, the OMB announced that it would undertake a comprehensive review of these categories. As part of the OMB review process, the National Center for Education Statistics and the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Education conducted a survey to determine how schools collect, maintain, and report race and ethnic data on their students. The report revealed that public schools in the West were the least likely to use the minimum five standard categories, whereas schools in the Northeast were the most likely to use only the minimum five categories. To reflect their diversity, schools in the West were adding categories and then aggregating up to the standard five categories as required for federal reporting.

The sources of diversity in the West included an increase in interracial marriage and increased immigration.[5] California has been on the leading edge in both of these national trends. Indeed, the California State Supreme Court ruling ending legal barriers to intermar-

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riage in California took effect in 1948—nearly two decades before the U.S. Supreme Court took action in 1967 to remove all remaining miscegenation laws in the nation.[6] And as of 1997, about 25 percent of the state's population was foreign-born compared to 10 percent in the nation.[7]

In 1997, after its comprehensive review, the OMB announced revisions of the federal guidelines for collecting data by race and ethnicity (Table 2). The new guidelines instruct people to select one or more racial categories.[8] Census 2000 will employ the revised categories, and other federal programs will adopt the standards no later than January 1, 2003. Ways to tabulate the new data remain an important, unresolved issue.[9] Clearly, if multiracial respondents are tabulated in a manner exclusive of their monoracial component groups, the numerical strength of monoracial groups will be diminished.

As a precursor to data that will be available as these standards are adopted, this report documents the rise in multiracial/ethnic births in California from 1982 to 1997, addressing the following questions: (1) What is the overall trend in multiracial/ethnic births in California? (2) What is the relationship between immigration and multiracial/ethnic births in California? (3) How does the occurrence of multiracial/ethnic births in California compare to the occurrence of monoracial and monoethnic births of Asians, African Americans, and Hispanic in California? (4) What is the racial/ethnic profile of California's multiracial/ethnic newborns?

The report concludes with a discussion of how the enumeration of multiracial/ethnic births may affect public policy, examining the effect of self-identification

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Table 1. OMB Classification Matrix, 1977–1997

Characteristic	Two-Question Format	One-Question Format
Race	White Black Asian or Pacific Islander American Indian or Alaskan Native	White, not of Hispanic origin Black, not of Hispanic origin Asian or Pacific Islander American Indian or Alaskan Native Hispanic
Ethnicity	Hispanic origin Not of Hispanic origin	

Table 2. OMB Revised Classification Matrix, October 1997 to Present

Characteristic	Two-Question Format	One-Question Format
Race	White Black or African American Asian American Indian or Alaska Native Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White Black or African American Asian American Indian or Alaska Native Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Hispanic or Latino
Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino Not Hispanic or Latino	

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and tabulation methodology on the relative size of racial and ethnic groups.

Data Source

Data for this report are derived from California Vital Statistics Birth Records. The birth records include information for mothers' and fathers' nativity, race, and Hispanic origin.[10] Vital Statistics Birth Records employ a two-question format for collecting racial and ethnic information. Although the racial and ethnic data in the birth records distinguish several Asian racial subgroups and several Hispanic ethnic subgroups, this report aggregates the data into the current OMB one-question format: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, black or African American, Hispanic or Latino (of any race), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and white.

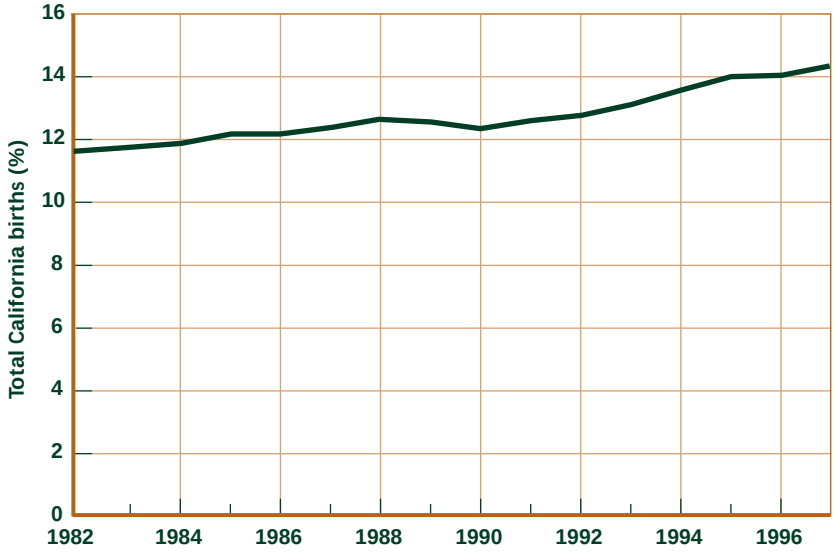
A multiracial/ethnic child is defined as one who has one parent from one of the racial/ethnic groups noted above and the other parent from another. Because maternal and paternal race/ethnicity data are coded in discrete monoracial and monoethnic categories, it is impossible to determine if either parent is multiracial or multiethnic; thus, the number of multiracial/ethnic births reported here may be biased downward. Conversely, since the race/ethnicity of the child in this study is derived data rather than self-identified data, it may overestimate the number of multiracial/ethnic births. In other words, some infants classified as multiracial/ethnic in this report might be identified as monoracial or monoethnic by their parents.[11]

Trends and Patterns

Although it has a racially and ethnically diverse population, and legal barriers to intermarriage were abandoned relatively early compared to many other states, California has experienced only a moderate increase in multiracial/ethnic births over the past 17 years. As a percentage of total births in the state, multiracial/ethnic births rose from just under 12 percent in 1982 to just over 14 percent in 1997 (Figure 1). This change represents a numerical increase in multiracial/ethnic births from about 50,000 in 1982 to about 70,000 in 1997.

The absence of a precipitous increase in the occurrence of multiracial/ethnic births can be explained by California's status as a large immigrant-receiving state. Numerous studies have shown that compared to the native-born, immigrants are less likely to marry a member of a different racial/ethnic group. This body of litera-

Figure 1. Percentage of Multiracial/Ethnic Births in California, 1982–1997



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ture cites various explanations for this tendency. Explanations include the fact that the foreign-born may be married at the time of immigration, they might be more likely to live in ethnic enclaves, they might be more closely tied to a culture that resists out-marriage, or they might encounter language barriers.[12] In fact, data on legal immigrants to California in 1996 indicate that 68 percent of new female immigrants and 58 percent of male immigrants were already married when they arrived in California.[13]

Figure 2 charts the trends in multiracial/ethnic births to California mothers by immigrant status. The figure shows that the rise in multiracial/ethnic births is a native-born phenomenon. Multiracial/ethnic births to native-born mothers rose dramatically between 1982 and 1997—from about 14 percent to 21 percent, a 50 percent change. In contrast, less than 8 percent of births to foreign-born mothers were multiracial/ethnic in 1982, and the number has remained relatively stable over the same 15-year period.

Figure 3 shows that the share of births to immigrant women has increased by nearly 50 percent since 1982. By 1997, births to foreign-born mothers accounted for roughly 45 percent of all births to California mothers. The size of the foreign-born population coupled with its relatively low occurrence of multiracial/ethnic births

Figure 2. Multiracial/Ethnic Births to Native-Born and Foreign-Born Mothers, California, 1982–1997

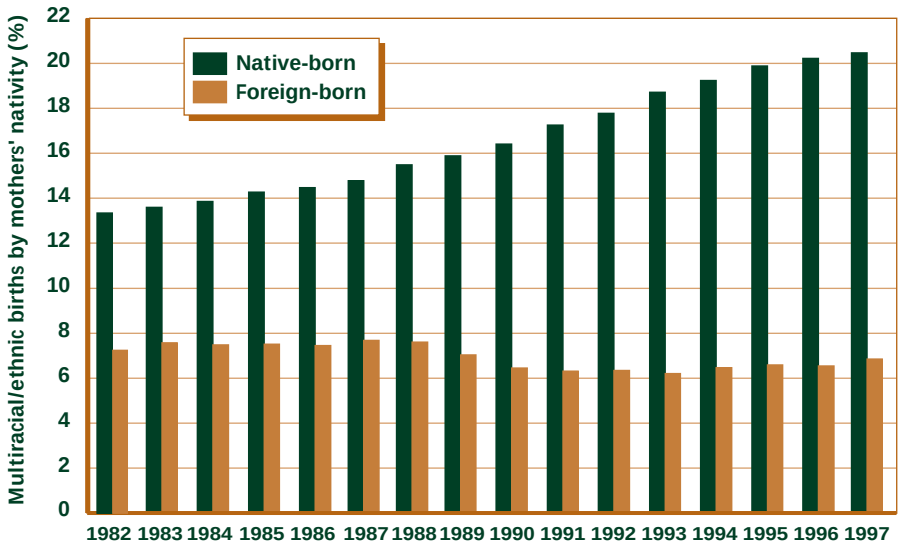

Figure 3. Births to Native-Born and Foreign-Born Mothers, California, 1982–1997

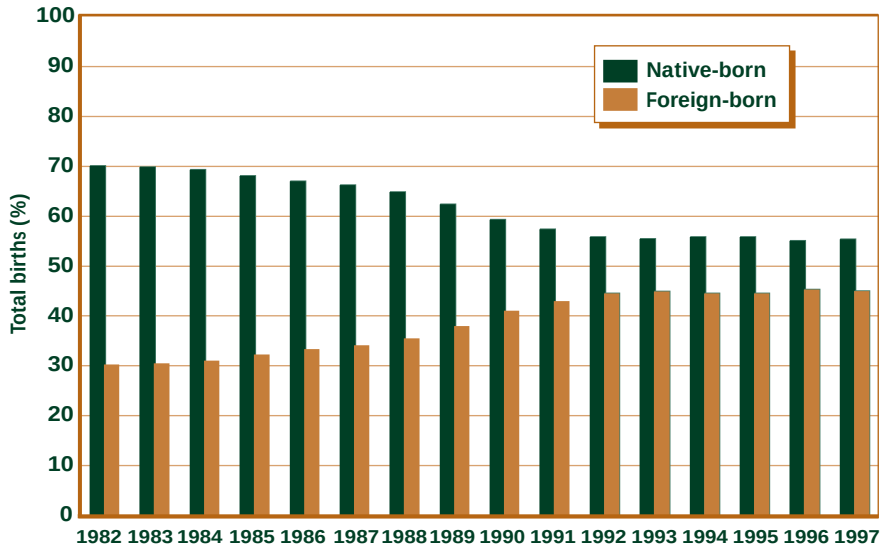

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Figure 4. Racial/Ethnic Composition of California Newborns, 1997

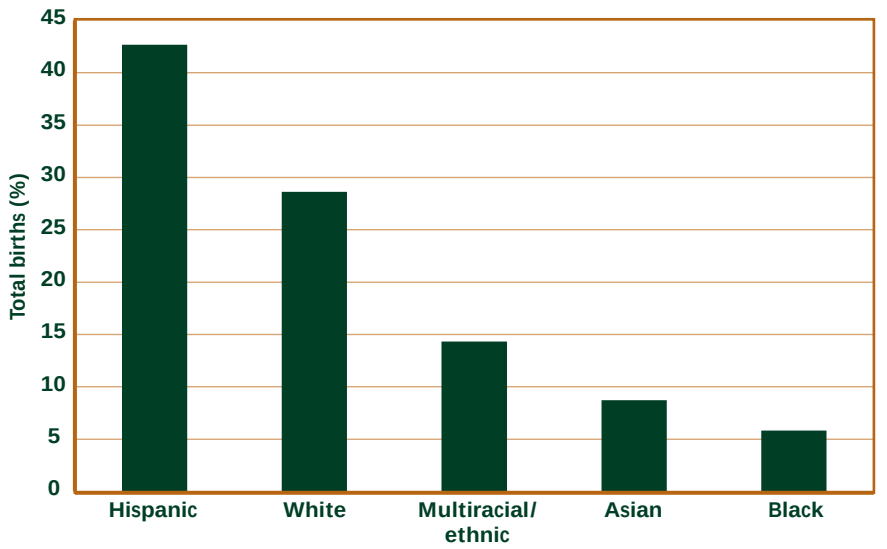
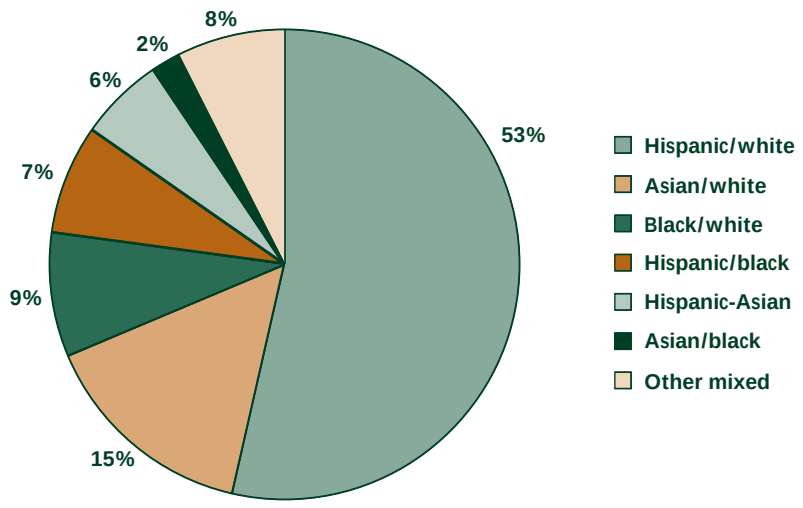


Figure 5. Profile of Multiracial/Ethnic Births, California, 1997



has tempered the overall increase in multiracial/ethnic births in California.

Figure 4 shows the racial/ethnic composition of California newborns in 1997. Multiracial/ethnic births outnumbered both monoracial Asian births and monoracial black births. The relative size of this multiracial/ethnic group provides a context for understanding the concerns raised by various civil rights groups. Indeed, the goal of accurately tracking this population complicates established tabulation procedures for monitoring and tracking civil rights. For example, it is still unclear whether or how statistically small multiple-race responses will be aggregated into larger groups.[14]

Figure 5 illustrates the relative proportions of California's multiracial/ethnic births for the largest multiracial/ethnic groups in 1997. Births to couples in which one partner was white non-Hispanic and the other was Hispanic, Asian, or black accounted for roughly 75 percent of all multiracial/ethnic births in 1997. The majority of these births were to Hispanic/white (non-Hispanic) couples (53 percent). Births to mixed Hispanic/black, Hispanic/Asian, and Asian/black couples accounted for 15 percent of multiracial/ethnic births. The remaining mixed births were to couples in which one partner was an American Indian or Alaska Native,

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native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander.

It is unclear how continued immigration will affect the trend in multiracial/ethnic births in California.[15] Generally, intermarriage rates for Hispanics and Asians increase with immigrant generation. For example, intermarriage estimates for Hispanics are 0.08, 0.32, and 0.57 for first, second, and third generations, respectively.[16] Thus, the effect of immigration will be determined by nativity and immigrant generation and also by group size, residential segregation, and the sex ratios of future immigrant populations. For example, members of small populations are much more likely to out-marry because their chances of meeting a potential mate from their own racial/ethnic group are lower than meeting individuals from other groups.[17]

Table 3 shows how several California counties rank in terms of their percentage of multiracial/ethnic births and percentage of foreign-born mothers, clearly showing an inverse relationship between the two. As noted above, factors such as residential segregation and group size also play important roles in determining the occurrence of multiracial/ethnic births. For example, the Los Angeles and Sacramento metropolitan areas differ in their degree of racial and ethnic residential segregation. Various indices of segregation show that Los Angeles is more highly segregated than Sacramento, especially for Hispanics and African Americans.[18] Furthermore, group size differences are dramatic between Los Angeles and Sacramento. For example, in 1997, 62 percent of births in Los Angeles were to Hispanic mothers, whereas only 21 percent of births in Sacramento were to Hispanic mothers.

California has experienced only a moderate increase in multiracial/ethnic births over the past 17 years.

Implications of a Growing Multiracial/Ethnic Population

The nation is far richer in racial and ethnic diversity than it was just 30 years ago. In fact, an increasing number of people nationwide embody this racial and ethnic diversity by virtue of their

Table 3. Multiracial/Ethnic Births and Percentage of Mothers Foreign-Born, Selected Counties, 1997

County	% of Mothers Foreign-Born, 1997	% Multiracial/Ethnic Births, 1997
Los Angeles	58	10
Orange	52	13
Santa Clara	52	15
Alameda	42	17
San Diego	41	18
Sacramento	27	19

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mixed racial or ethnic ancestry. Between 1960 and 1990, the number of interracial couples in the nation increased nearly tenfold, rising from 157,000 to roughly 1,500,000; and the 1990 U.S. Census counted nearly 2 million children nationwide living in multiracial households.[19]

As for California, the release of Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal data showed that one out of every 20 people in the City of Sacramento identified themselves as multiracial.[20] This is more than double the 2 percent benchmark that Census officials expect to find nationwide after results are tabulated for Census 2000. But perhaps even more indicative of future trends—in California if not in the nation—is that in Sacramento, those under 18 years of age were nearly twice as likely to be of mixed race than their adult counterparts.[21] Clearly, the multiracial population is increasing.

What will the policy effects associated with governmental recognition of this growing population be? To a large extent, this will depend on how respondents choose to identify themselves and how the data are tabulated. Tabulations of data not only for Census 2000 but also for records related to births, school registrations, employment, and mortgage applications are vital for monitoring and enforcement efforts associated with the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act. For this reason, organizations such as the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the Equal Employment Advisory Council have expressed reservations about collecting multiracial data before establishing tabulation methods that would not impede civil rights efforts.[22]

The analysis of birth record data presented here, in contrast to the Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal analysis noted above, illustrates how various methods for deriving and tabulating data affect results.[23] Analytically treating Hispanic ethnicity as a race greatly increases estimates of the multiracial/ethnic population, whereas limiting the analysis exclusively to racial data yields lower multiracial estimates, partly because many Hispanics identify their race as "white." For example, in the analysis of birth data (see Table 3), Hispanic ethnicity is treated as if it were a racial category, yielding a multiracial/ethnic estimate of 19 percent of total births. Although ethnicity data are collected, Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal tabulations employ only race data to produce an estimate of 10 percent multiracial for children younger than 18 years of age.[24] Estimates for the nation's multiracial population versus the nation's multiracial/ethnic population show the same pattern. Multiracial Ameri-

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cans constitute only about 2 percent of the total population[25] whereas multiracial/ethnic Americans constitute an estimated 7 percent of the population.[26] Additional tabulation issues are discussed at length in a recent report prepared by the OMB.[27]

Tabulation methods are not the only potential source of variation in enumeration of the multiracial population. Qualitative studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that racial and ethnic identities may be fluid in the lives of some mixed race or mixed ethnic people, changing from context to context or changing over time.[28] This may be particularly true for those whose identity is not constrained by their appearance—those who cannot easily be singled out as members of a particular racial or ethnic group. The potential effect of such fluid identity on data integrity is unclear. For example, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commisson requires that employers collect racial and ethnic data. These data are then compared with a special Census benchmark file to make inferences about discrimination in the workforce.[29] Data consistency across these two sources is vital for making valid inferences.

As noted above, the results of a national *Current Population Survey* conducted in 1995 indicated that multiracial Americans currently constitute only about 2 percent of the total population.[30] However, the level of media attention this issue has generated since 1995 may influence the likelihood that respondents will identify themselves as multiracial.[31] Regardless of the exact proportion of the population that multiracial Americans constitute when Census 2000 data are tabulated, it is evident that the nation's population is outgrowing monoracial categories.

The mounting complexity of racial and ethnic identity has led some critics of the OMB to suggest that the cost of collecting multiple-race data would be prohibitive; other critics have gone even further, suggesting that there be no collection of racial data.[32] Yet, racial and ethnic discrimination still exists, and statutory requirements demand that the government continue to collect racial and ethnic data. Despite California's passage of Proposition 209 in 1996, which banned race- or gender-based preferences in public employment, public education, and public contracting, approximately 30 race-conscious statutes remain on the books in California, and the state must still comply with the federal civil rights laws encompassed in the civil rights acts noted above.[33] The question that we must confront in the coming years is how we will ensure the civil rights of a population that is outgrowing the monoracial categories upon which civil rights laws have been interpreted. ◆

Multiracial Americans constitute only about 2 percent of the total population whereas multiracial/ethnic Americans constitute an estimated 7 percent of the population.

Our web site version of this report contains two appendices with additional county-level data. *www.ppic.org*

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Notes

[1] The definitions of race and ethnicity used in this report are derived from current OMB standards. Multiracial refers to any individual who can claim two or more of the following OMB racial designations: white, black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native. Multiethnic refers to any individual who can claim to be partly of Hispanic or Latino origin and partly not of Hispanic or Latino origin. The terms "multiracial/ethnic or mixed race/ethnicity" refer to any individual who is either multiethnic or multiracial.

[2] The U.S. Census Bureau was granted an exemption to OMB's standards for the 1980 and 1990 censuses. The exemption allowed the Census Bureau to include an "other" write-in response to the race question. See National Research Council, Committee on National Statistics, *Spotlight on Heterogeneity: The Federal Standards for Racial and Ethnic Classification (Summary of a Workshop)*, National Academy Press, Washington D.C., 1996.

[3] Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," *Federal Register*, October 30, 1997. http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/fedreg/Ombdir15.html.

[4] Naomi Zack, ed., *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Maryland, 1995; Maria P. P. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California, 1992.

[5] National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *Racial and Ethnic Classifications Used by Public Schools*, NCES 96-092, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., March 1996.

[6] Bancroft-Whitney Company, *Reports of Cases Determined in The Supreme Court of the State of California, May 25, 1948 to November 1, 1948*, Vol. 32 2d, San Francisco, 1949; *Perez v. Sharp* [32 C.2d 711;198 P.2d 17].

[7] Diane Schmidley and Herman A. Alvarado, *Current Population Reports, The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: March 1997* (Update), Census Bureau, P20-507, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic and Statistics Administration, March 1998.

[8] At this time, the OMB has not included a provision in the standards that would allow multiethnic respondents to select both "Hispanic Origin" and "Not of Hispanic Origin." See Executive Office of the President (1997), op. cit.

[9] For detailed discussion of tabulation issues, see Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, "Draft Provisional Guidance on the Implementation of the 1997 Standards for the Collection of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," *Federal Register*, Washington D.C., February 17, 1999. To meet redistricting needs, the Census Bureau has decided to provide data with 63 categories for race in combination with Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicity. There are 63 potential single- and multiple-race categories consisting of six monoracial categories and 57 categories for biracial and multiracial respondents.

[10] Approximately 1 percent of the data on mothers' race and ethnicity and generally less than 4 percent of the data for fathers' race and ethnicity are missing. Records with missing race and ethnic data are excluded from the analysis.

[11] M. C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990.

[12] Betty Lee Sung, "Chinese American Intermarriage," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. XXI, No. 3, Autumn 1990, pp. 337–352; Sharon M. Lee and Marilyn Fernandez, "Trends in Asian American Racial/Ethnic Intermarriage: A Comparison of 1980 and 1990 Census Data," *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1998, pp. 323–342; Douglas T. Gurak, "Family Formation and Marital Selectivity Among Colombian and Dominican Immigrants in New York City," *International Migration Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, 1987, pp. 275–298.

[13] State of California, Department of Finance, *Legal Immigration to California in Federal Fiscal Year 1996*, Sacramento, California, June 1999.

[14] For a detailed discussion of tabulation options, see Executive Office of the President (1999), op. cit.

[15] Native-born, adult children of immigrants out-marry at a higher rate than their parents. For national origin population group projections that consider exogamy estimates by generation, see Barry Edmonston, Sharon Lee, and Jeffrey Passel, "U.S. Population Projections for National Origin Groups: Taking into Account Ethnicity and Exogamy," *Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section*,

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Annual Meeting of the American Statistical Association, Toronto, Canada, August 13–18, 1994, pp. 100–105.

[16] Data based on 1990 census microdata and 1994 birth data from the National Center for Health Statistics. See James P. Smith and Barry Edmonston, eds., *The New Americans: Economic Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*, National Academy Press, Washington D.C., 1997.

[17] Peter M. Blau, *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure*, Collier Macmillan Publishers, The Free Press, New York, 1977.

[18] U.S. Census Bureau, 1990. http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/resseg.html.

[19] U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Public Use Microdata Samples: Table 4, Race of Child by Race of Householder and of Spouse or Partner 1990; Table 2, Race of Couples: 1990; Table 1, Race of Wife by Race of Husband: 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991, and 1992. www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/interrace.html. Internet release date 6/10/98.

[20] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal, P.L. 94-171 (Redistricting) Summary File, 1999.

[21] Tony Bizak, "Growing Diversity Evident in Census: Whites No Longer Capital's Majority," *Sacramento Bee*, May 2, 1999, p. A1.

[22] Executive Office of the President (1997), op. cit.

[23] A number of additional factors limit the comparability of these two analyses. These include (1) geographical coverage differences, (2) racial/ethnic self-identification versus researcher-derived racial/ethnic assignments, and (3) state allocation of virtually all Hispanics to the "white" racial category in the Birth Records versus racial self-identification into six different racial categories in the Census Dress Rehearsal data.

[24] See "Recommendations from the Interagency Committee for the Review of the Racial and Ethnic Standards to the Office of Management and Budget Concerning Changes to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," *Federal Register*, July 9, 1997, for a summary of data collection methodology and its effect on responses.

[25] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *A CPS Supplement for Testing Methods of Collecting Racial and Ethnic Information*, May 1995, October 1995.

[26] Reynolds Farely, "Presentation to the Race Advisory Board," speech delivered at One America in the 21st Century, The President's Initiative on Race, Washington, D.C., September 30, 1997.

[27] Executive Office of the President (1999), op. cit.

[28] Lynell George, "Inside Story; Guessing Games," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, February 21, 1999, p. 18.

[29] Kenneth E. Payson, "Check One Box: Reconsidering Directive No. 15 and the Classification of Mixed-Race People," *California Law Review*, Vol. 84, 1996, pp. 1233–1291.

[30] U.S. Department of Labor (1995), op. cit.

[31] For examples see Faye Fiore, "Multiple Race Choices to Be Allowed on 2000 Census," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A, October 30, 1997; Michael A. Fletcher, "Interracial Marriages Eroding Barriers," *Washington Post*, December 1998; Jerelyn Eddings, "Counting a 'New' Type of American," *U.S. News Online*, July 14, 1997, p. A1; Bizak (1999), op. cit.

[32] Executive Office of the President (1997), op. cit.

[33] State of California, Office of Governor Pete Wilson, "Statutes Which Appear to Violate Article I Section 31 of the California Constitution," Fact Sheet, September 9, 1997.

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